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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the processes of interaction and exchange that are involved in the creation and circulation of literary and scholarly works, texts that contribute to the Australian information commons. For this purpose, the paper refers to specific aspects of the scholarly work cycle of the Australian historian, Henry Reynolds, and comments on the interaction between scholars and creative writers and the libraries and archives they explore. The first section provides an overview of Reynolds' work, including research in the Public Records office and the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society in England, the archives of North Queensland, the British House of Commons, the London Missionary Society, and Rhodes House Oxford. The second section discusses the value of historical resources and the intersection of public and academic spheres. The third section addresses issues related to libraries as critical institutions, including funding problems, the increasing volume of information in more formats, and ownership and access. (Contains 34 references.) (MES)

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Proceedings

Libraries and Literary Outcomes: A Crucial Intersection in the Cultural Field

Anne Galligan

As mediating cultural institutions the National Library of Australia and the library network across Australia serve as an "elaborate national public memory system" (Burns 44). This national library network is a primary component in the cultural infrastructure that undergirds an Australian information or knowledge commons, a public domain of information. This commons is an active site of exploration and contestation that is added to daily and reinterpreted, playing a fundamental role in the knowledge creation process. Peter Drahos describes the intellectual commons as "an unusual resource in that it grows in strength through exploitation" (Drahos qtd Cottier:3). In a period of social and economic change that is, in many ways, being driven by a globalisation of resources where "information itself is becoming an economic driver" (Wainwright 5), the value of the information commons is increasingly recognised in government policy and reports such as *Grasping New Paradigms: Australia as an Information Society* (1991), *Creative Nation* (1994) and *Navigating the Economy of Knowledge* (1995). It is also threatened by an undermining of the notion of free access to information, a cordoning off of the commons by business interests with the progressive commodification of information and knowledge, and by a general weakening of the traditionally accepted principle of free government services supplied as a public good or 'in the national interest' (Frow 211).

The Australian library network functions as both a storehouse of the national textual estate and a gateway to this information commons, playing the role of mediator in a process of knowledge exchange. A recent report recognises the library as a "vital component of the 'creative infrastructure' which is critical to Australia's future social, economic and cultural development in the knowledge economy" (Mercer 1). As a service institution, it provides the Australian public with "access to much of their intellectual and cultural documentary heritage through publicly funded libraries and archives" (Horton 268). These libraries "have a national mission to maximize the efficient delivery of library and information services to the Australian community" (Cunningham 10). The importance of the library in the literary field is underlined by this active and supportive relationship with writers, researchers and scholars, "an implicit nexus between those who create books and the institutions that look after them" (Thompson 13). Although library policy does not directly influence textual outcomes, the availability of resources and means of access are of great concern to researchers and authors, and have a long-term impact on the nature and content of future scholarly and creative texts. I want to demonstrate the processes of interaction and exchange that are involved in the creation and circulation of literary and scholarly works, texts that contribute to the Australian information commons. For this purpose, I will refer to specific aspects of the scholarly work cycle of Professor Henry Reynolds and also comment on this intersection between the scholar and creative writer and the libraries and archives they explore.

Alternative Histories and Possible Outcomes

The work of the historian Henry Reynolds has reached a diverse audience and the implications of his research findings have been radical and transformative, almost shattering in their continuing unfolding across the Australian public sphere. Reynolds began a journey in 1966 as a young academic in Townsville, a journey of personal and academic rigour across the divides of scholarly research, social action, and political and legal debate. Initially accepting the established boundaries and traditional academic perspectives of his field, Reynolds concentrated his studies on convict and white settler historical discourse. As a teacher of Australian history, however, he was increasingly

confronted by his own ignorance of frontier history and race relations between Australia's indigenous people and the white settlers. On a personal level, he was also challenged by immediate situations and experiences in Townsville, "deeply disturbing things" that "didn't fit easily into any of my assumptions about my own society" (Reynolds 1999:47,9). He realised that there was "no material, no analysis, no stories which would enable the community to understand the nature of contemporary relations between white and black Australians" (95).

By early 1970, Reynolds had shifted the focus of his own research "from Tasmania to Queensland, from class to race, from convict and free settlers to Aborigines" (90). He presented his first paper on the subject in the history department at James Cook University in the same year (90, 92). This was followed by six months study leave in England researching Australian history in the Public Records office and the library of the Royal Commonwealth Society which housed "a comprehensive collection of documents from white settler societies" (96). A selection of relevant documents was collated and published in 1972 as *Aborigines and Settlers*. His first article, "Violence, the Aboriginals and the Australian Historian", was published in the literary journal *Meanjin* in December 1972. These publications helped to open a space for further research and Reynolds received his first major research grant.

Initial explorations of the archives of North Queensland by Reynolds and his researcher/ student-in-arms, Noel Loos, included reading documents, diaries and reminiscences left by pastoralists, sugar planters, officials and travellers" (99-100). They covered Government Gazettes, magistrates' reports, inquest files; official records where he found surprisingly "frank and open discussion" of frontier conflict (118). Over an extended period, Reynolds read more than fifty colonial newspapers, "every frontier newspaper that had survived, wherever it was or whatever its condition - in the basement of city libraries, in rural council chambers and newspaper offices" (119). The Queensland papers of the 19th century included the *Queenslander*, the *Townsville Herald, Rockhampton Bulletin* and *Moreton Bay Free Press, Peak Downs Telegram, Cooktown Courier, Torres Strait Pilot,* the *Hodgkinson Mining News* and the *Ravenswood Miner* (Reynolds 1990:263). He described these newspapers as "the most revealing and most copious source of material" (Reynolds 1999:119). The material Reynolds amassed told a strong story as "the evidence pushed me inch by inch towards a quite different story from the one I had grown up and celebrated in my first serious work of research" (129).

Later research forays to England covered the British House of Commons Sessional Papers of the 19th century, records of the London Missionary Society, missionary journals and newsletters, and papers from the Anti-Slavery Society of the British Empire held at Rhodes House Oxford (Reynolds 1990:262-3). As the scope of this work expanded Reynolds examined the Parliamentary papers and proceedings from all the Australian states, official manuscripts from all the State Archives Offices, Native Police Papers and Magistrates reports, company records, pictorial collections, explorers' diaries and the diaries and letters of Colonial Secretaries, "Government Residents" and various officials such as the 'Protector' or 'Travelling Inspector' of the Aborigines (255-63). In collaboration with Noel Loos and Eddie Mabo, he initiated oral history interviews with the Aboriginal and Islander families of North Queensland, recognising that "indigenous people had their own informal, oral, dissident history of European settlement" (Reynolds 1999:100).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s other research on Aboriginal history, regional histories and broader indigenous issues was released into the information commons in the form of books, theses, articles in scholarly journals and conference papers. This work, by scholars such as John Mulvaney, Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders, Kathryn Cronin, Kevin Gilbert, Noel Loos, Peter Read, Ann Curthoys and Bain Attwood served to stimulate debate and initiate further research projects. As one academic stated simply in a survey of scholarly publishing and academic attitudes conducted in 1995, "scholarship builds on scholarship" (qtd Sullivan 41). This process of circulation of ideas, information, new narratives and new knowledges invites the critical appraisal of all sectors of the community. It often provokes heated debate, as indeed, Reynolds' work has done. However, these debates should be recognised as an essential part of that "continuous and unsparing evaluation and criticism of scholarship" (42), where researchers determine whether to "carry those results further or to refute them by more careful or imaginative research" (Pelikan qtd Sullivan 42).

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the field of research expanded again as "The whole native title process [drew] historians into its quasi-judicial machinery" (Reynolds 2000:2). Confronted this time by a lack of expertise in "law and the many legal issues which underlay the whole Colonial venture" (Reynolds 1999:193), Reynolds found himself immersed in the history of international law, imperial and Commonwealth law and the jurisprudence of other common-law settler societies such as New Zealand, Canada and the United States (194). American Supreme Court judgements of the 1820s and 1830s became immensely important to this Australian history scholar as he realised that the whole doctrine of white settler discovery and Indian native title was argued in the American courts in this period (196).

Perhaps one of the most important moments for Reynolds came after "hours of fruitless reading" of "microfilm copies of handwritten Colonial Office records from the 1830s" (198). He had found the minute books of the South Australian Colonisation Commission covering negotiations for final approval for settlement in 1836 with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Glenelg. Renolds recalls that:

> Suddenly I saw an entry that totally startled me. ... It was what I had been looking for, what I had thought should be there somewhere in the records. It was like discovering a nugget of gold. (199)

This document confirmed that the Colonial Office, "the centre of empire", regarded the Aborigines as landowners and that "the colonists were required by law to purchase the land" (199). The research process had unearthed a piece of evidence which had the potential to "dramatically change the interpretation of both colonial history and jurisprudence" (198). The unfolding legal judgements surrounding the Mabo High Court decision and ongoing Aboriginal land claims testify to the critical nature of this form of historical documentation, and to interpretations of the original intentions of government and legal decisions of the 19th century. This interaction across the disciplinary borders of history and law is not surprising because, as Goodall observes, "The law is deeply engaged with history, both in theory and practice: in its appeal to precedent and often to antiquity" (Goodall 107-8). However, the implications for contemporary Australian society in its political, legal and broader community interactions are complex and ongoing.

Critical intersections

Obviously the historical resources that were uncovered and examined in this process of reclamation and critical debate are expensive items to house and curate from the librarian's point of view. However, the value of these dispersed collections is immeasurable to the researcher, enabling a re-release of information into the public sphere at a different historical moment. Historian Humphrey McQueen refers to this painstaking process of "tracking down an original source" as "a pedantry which distinguishes scholars" (McQueen 55). Lucy Frost, whose work crosses the boundaries of literature and history, reclaiming women's narratives (previously unpublished letters, diaries and manuscripts) from the archival store, refers to this operation more romantically as "sleuthing in the archives" (Frost 2000). However, the work itself is far from romantic according to Frost:

> I have never entered an Archives Office which looks like a friendly place, or a place of story. As a built environment, they are spaces which say, go away. - The color spectrum I associate with the interior design for archival deposits runs from muddy brown to black. - Microfiche are not colorful. (2000)

Nevertheless, these travels through the archives and libraries, for Reynolds and many other scholars, slowly opened up "avenues of understanding" of Aboriginal and settler history (Reynolds 1999:99). As Attwood puts it, these historians assumed "the function of 'remembrancers' by reminding White Australia of what it would prefer to forget" (Attwood xv). The historical detail uncovered over this particular period built a picture of Australian history from a different perspective, 'counter-memories' that are both controversial and intensely political.

For Reynolds, what had begun as an earnest search to address a lack of knowledge became a

professional commitment to fill in dark gaps in the narrative of Australian history. As the research progressed, the size of the audience reached by this work slowly grew. The nature of the publics involved in the widening scope of this program and its implications across Australian social, political and legal life also changed. Initially confined within the comparative shelter of academic networks, Reynolds acknowledged that if he had "spoken out about these things in pubs and clubs around the north, rather than writing earnestly often in academic journals and serious books, I would have ended up on my back many times over " (Reynolds 1999:123). However, the forum for debate expanded to include regional and national newspapers, radio talk shows, public forums, writers' festivals, international conferences and the private briefing rooms of barristers and Queen's Counsels. What began as a cross examination by academics and historians, was eventually cross examined and arduously tested by barristers, Queen's Counsels and judges of the High Court.

It could be argued that the work of Henry Reynolds presents an exceptional case. However, I want to emphasise the conflation of academic, cultural, social and political spheres that provided the environment for this journey that contributed to a re-mapping of the Australia historical landscape that is still being challenged and tested. There was a crossing of fields of research, of academic networks and scholarly infrastructure. Resources were drawn from national and international networks of libraries and archives, and the results of this work released through a variety of speaking and publishing outcomes. This intersection of scholarly and public spheres does create a valuable example of the work cycle of a professional academic. It demonstrates that part of the professional commitment of the Australian academic community (confirmed by the 1995 survey), to "conduct research of social relevance and to publish the results", a "commitment to transfer of knowledge for the benefit of society" (Sullivan 42).

Critical institutions

As a cultural institution, the library stands within the community "as a symbol of the importance of knowledge and learning" (Awcock 7), playing an understated but pivotal role in the knowledge-creation process. The national library network remains situated as "the principal providers of information infrastructure to the research community" of Australia (McLean 40). Despite government statements of commitment to developing Australia as an information society or knowledge economy, however, this network of cultural and educational institutions has never been securely positioned, but has operated from a "fragile and often threatened position" in state and national government public services (Galligan 109). It is an infrastructure that has been slowly and painstakingly built and often only marginally maintained. It is a vital structural element in the nation's heritage and a key component of the national and international information commons.

A collaborative investigation by the Australian Research Libraries Fighting Fund has stated that "Australia's information future was increasingly at risk because of market forces associated with the globalisation of information infrastructure (Richardson 40). Another survey released in 1999, *Looking for Books* compiled by Leon Cantrell, "points to serious defects in the management and funding of this crucial aspect of research infrastructure" (Roe 5). Approximately fifty percent of respondents in this survey indicated that their libraries were inadequate for teaching and research purposes beyond undergraduate level. There were additional limitations for academics working in new or highly specialised fields, or located at regional universities (Cantrell 18).

Funding for Australian libraries has not kept pace with "the unrelenting increases in the costs and volume of the world's publishing output" (Reed-Scott xxviii). Rather than an expanding scenario, an examination of the 'financially challenged' world of academic libraries shows substantial funding reductions in collection development across these institutions, "an overall downward trend" (Flesch 85). This reduction in funding allocation has been exacerbated by the steadily declining purchasing power of the Australian dollar since the mid-80s. The impact of each currency devaluation on library collections is simple and direct. "A drop of five percent in the exchange rate [leaves] one journal in every twenty without funding" (McQueen 56). In announcing large-scale cancellations of subscriptions and a shrinking acquisition budget at the National Library of Australia (NLA), this premier library justified the decision (in part) by claiming that other Australian libraries have greatly expanded their collections and that "access to these collections has improved" (NLA 2). One

commentator expressed dismay, stating that these libraries have the expectation that the National Library will "pick up their slack" after a difficult period of decreasing acquisition capabilities (McCalman 1996:A13).

At the same time, the national library network is required to provide access to an exponentially increasing volume of information, in more formats, and using increasingly sophisticated electronic services. Technological alternatives are promoted to compensate for fewer materials on the shelves and fewer staff. While electronic resources undoubtedly create a richer and more diversified information environment, technology cannot provide all the answers. Neil McLean, librarian at Macquarie University explains that, "The introduction of parallel print and electronic versions of the same journal has not helped resolve the problems of cost to libraries who find themselves having to pay more, not less, for the information" (McLean 40). Although a high proportion of print based journals are now available in electronic databases there are important gaps because not all articles in each issue make the transition to the electronic version. Often only the key articles by known authors are selected. In addition, these versions do not include book reviews, letters to the editor or forum discussions which are often an essential resource for the research community, especially PhD students investigating that cutting edge topic.

It is also apparent that for libraries, issues of ownership and access have not been solved by this shift to electronic resources, but are in fact becoming more critical as the information commons is increasingly privatised. In this transitional period where "real power is increasingly associated with information" (Bloch & Hesse 2), there is what Eric Wainwright refers to as the "mainstreaming of information" (Wainwright 5), where publishers and information providers are reassessing their publishing policies and redefining strategic assets, amassing banks of copyrightable material. These shifts in the international information environment are dramatically "altering the economics of acquiring global resources" (Reed-Scott xviii). While increased competition in the online environment may serve to lower costs of acquiring intellectual property, concern has been expressed that the multinational conglomerates will adopt a policy of "ruthless monopolistic pricing of print and Internet information provision" (Steele qtd Juddery 4). These complex factors combine to restrict the development of that national resource base that is the Australian information commons and will inevitably effect the process of knowledge creation.

Conclusion

The gradual expansion of the sphere of study conducted by Henry Reynolds involved significant shifts in resource requirements across national and international libraries and archives. The function of this paper has been to demonstrate the symbiotic and enabling nature of this relationship between the scholar and the library as a public service institution. Kaye Gapen states in *Virtual Libraries* that the "mission of the library is actually the social and intellectual responsibility of the librarian to participate with our publics in the solution of problems and the creation of new knowledge" (Gapen 5,6). This partnership between librarians and researchers is, according to McLean, "an essential element in the struggle for survival" in an environment that is being "restructured by the irresistible forces of information technology" and the "apparent economic rationalism that informs much of the debate on the global knowledge economy" (40).

This paper also highlights the implications and outworkings of this process of knowledge creation in terms of completed textual outcomes, intellectual and public debate, social action and legislation. This is how the information commons can work. There is a system of exchange other than that of the marketplace. There is a legitimate value system beyond the realm of the economic field and its associated cost analysis. In expressing her concern over depleting library resources, the outsourcing of archival functions and the "improper" disposal of valuable files and public records, Professor Jill Roe observed that:

> No doubt the research libraries of the 21st century will be different, but they still have to be chocked full of real sources. "New narratives" will emerge only if libraries are sufficiently well funded to collect and preserve the materials which are increasingly diverse, on which those narratives can be based. (5)

This is one way Australia can capitalise on the knowledge base of its intellectuals and scholars, creative authors, educators and research students. It is in the national interest.

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